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Echoes of No Thing: Thinking between Heidegger and Dōgen

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Augenblickstätte and Nikon

In this chapter, we will continue to look at the different (though, as already pointed out, at times, similar) ways in which Heidegger and Dōgen conceptualize thinking the idea of the time-less-time of the now-time. This thinking is of a primordial time, and if we are to think with Heidegger (and to think with Dōgen as well) it is critical to understanding the space of the event, the place of pure, undistorted, perceiving that both Heidegger and Dōgen point us towards. To open us to the event of pure perception, to ready the ground for a new beginning, to prepare us to *be-come*, Heidegger draws on a long tradition and understanding of the *Augenblick*. As with all things in Heidegger however, his contributions to understanding this concept are unique and solitary.

In *The Glance of an Eye*, William McNeil traces the attempt to think the *Augenblick* from Heidegger's understanding of it and locates its genesis in Aristotle's original five-fold description of the phenomenon of perception (*All men desire to know*¹), described in Book I of the *Metaphysics*. Aristotle read in *theōria* the idea of "seeing" or "pure beholding"; knowing and seeing, then, are bound to each other inextricably, and perception — or, to take the argument away from the purely visual — the *perceiv-*

¹ Aristotle, *The Works of Aristotle*, trans. W.D. Ross (Chicago: The University of Chicago, 1952).

ing of a world is to behold and know a world. In desiring to know, according to both McNeill and Heidegger, all men desire to see. In the perceiving, we open ourselves not just to the *seeing* with eyes, but to the senses which are located primordially in our experiencing, that exist *avant* our approach — not just to *listen*, but to listen to the unsaid, the unheard, the silences *in between*; to *taste* what cannot be tasted merely on the palate, but which evokes a flavor of something forgotten; to smell in a flower or a dung heap not just the most apparent smells but to the unsmelt. In this world, the *hearing*, the *smelling*, the *seeing*, the *tasting*, the *touching* are not merely hearing, smelling, seeing, tasting and touching; they are, in encountering the myriad phenomena, what defines the human being. *All men desire to know. All men desire to see.* To perceive is to come to know, and in perceiving we open ourselves to the act of knowing, or to the possibility of experiencing something we had not known, or seen before. To desire this is not simply a want or a requirement. To desire is to crave, to demand, to pull towards. That which is desired calls forth the subject to ardourously desire. Earlier in this study we evoked Heidegger's "draft" of thinking as that which attracts us by its withdrawal; Heidegger writes that "we are who we are by pointing in that direction."² This desire acts as a draft towards the between of the sensed, and works to open us to a world already present, yet not yet sensed.

The *Augenblick*, as a "blink of an eye," is a sudden seeing, an unexpected illumination of a world, dark in its withdrawal. Through the *Augenblick*, this world is suddenly remembered, brought to the foreground, *enlightened*. It occurs, as the name suggests, in an instant, and, like a spark, is gone as we come to perceive it; the *Augenblick* is already in the past as it comes to be. In this way, it acts as a portal; it is not a something, but, as a vehicle, brings something to something. In its absencing, the suddenness of its departure is felt as a presence, if only an

2 Martin Heidegger, *Basic Writings*, ed. David Farrell Krell (New York: Harper & Row, 1977), 374.

absent presence, something wished for, with ardour, something desired.

We see flashes of the *Augenblick* throughout Western thought, especially within mystical traditions. Hegel, though far from dealing with the concept in anything close to a sustained way, seems to hint towards this idea when he discusses the “fire process” as a “flash” (*Augenblick*) which brings forth — momentarily — the distinguishing character of life. In both Kierkegaard and especially Nietzsche, concerns with the existential, transcendental moment of seeing afforded by the *Augenblick* are paramount. For Kierkegaard, the glance of an eye operating as a sudden, transcendental moment is called the *Øieblik* and lays the ground for a moment of revelation, the preparation for the leap out of ordinary time and the forging of a subjective experience of something “eternal” and “transcendent.” In Kierkegaard, we see the existential movement of the “glance” become a transformative reordering of the self, directing experience towards a higher, more meaningful existence.³

For Heidegger as well, the *Augenblick* is born in a moment of existential crisis, except that this moment risks, unless surpassed, resulting in destruction and loss. The impetus for transformation — perhaps in the wake of the social and political cataclysms of the twentieth century — and its destruction, from Auschwitz to Dresden to Hiroshima, is paramount for Heidegger, and it is in crisis where we are most able, most prepared, to experience the *Augenblick*. Heidegger sees in Nietzsche a similar resonance of the crisis and he takes up this concern with a sustained reading of the “Moment” in his two volume study and lecture course on Nietzsche from 1943. Heidegger in his thinking alludes often to what the space, or clearing, of the *Augenblick* allows; that within that clearing, *Ereignis* as the authentic manifesting of *alētheia*, may take place.

3 Søren Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Anxiety: A Simple Psychologically Orienting Deliberation on the Dogmatic Issue of Hereditary Sin*, trans. Reidar Thomte (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), 70.

For Dōgen, as a thinker from a distinctly different time and tradition, the challenge of a closely defined *Augenblick* is admittedly somewhat harder to take up and the risks in doing so are greater. We will see, however, in passages of “Uji” and elsewhere “echoes” of this concept. In Dōgen’s imprecation to watch our coarse understanding of prosaic time, like body and mind, “fall away” in order to “allow” an understanding of a primordial time to manifest itself, what arises he will call the “right-now” or “here and now” of *nikon*. The experiencing of *nikon* as the exposure of oneself to the “mutual non-obstruction of things and things” is akin, perhaps, to what Heidegger refers when he describes the human being as “that which is wafted along by history (the event) and swept up into Being, that which belongs to Being.”⁴ Both ideas echo, closely for Heidegger and less so for Dōgen, Aristotle’s conception of perception, especially as seen in the opening of *Metaphysics*.

While a direct line of thinking from Aristotle through Dōgen to Heidegger is tenuous at best, it is critical to our study to examine how we can read in each thinker’s preferred terms the echoes we have sought. In *nous* for Aristotle, *satori* or *kensho* for Dōgen, and the *Augenblick* for Heidegger, there exist similarities in our experiences of them, but there are just as many limitations. Each points us to a place where language as a pointer falls away, and we are left, perhaps permanently, in the space where the sensible world we have experienced heretofore is left behind. Like Wittgenstein, we are left at a place where language can no longer serve us. For Aristotle, *nous* came to mean, as the five of the highest virtues of thinking, a sort of unmediated intellectual apprehension of *phainomena*. We place ourselves in a wondering relation to the world, and, at a certain point, after the practices of the other forms of cognition are mastered, we avail ourselves of the pure apprehending of a world. In Dōgen, it is the experience of *satori*, or *kensho*, that is a priority. It is important to note

4 Martin Heidegger, *Contributions to Philosophy (Of the Event)*, trans. Richard Rojcewicz and Daniela Vallega-Neu (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2012), 387.

that though *satori* is often translated as enlightenment, it means, more closely, “momentary awareness.” Though often used interchangeably, *kenshō* is translated most closely as meaning “seeing onto one’s own nature.” Whichever term is used, the process of exposure to the emptiness of all things is the critical goal of Zen practice, and is best described by the phrase already used by Dōgen, that of “body and mind falling off.” These two concepts — the unmediated experience of *phainomena* in Aristotle and the pure seeing of emptiness in the Zen tradition — ready us to understand more clearly the *Augenblick*, or “sudden glance of the eye” through which our most transitory, finite selves are revealed in an equally finite world.

As already noted, to describe a one-to-one comparison with *nous* and Dōgen’s experience of time is flawed, as flawed perhaps as comparing *nous* directly with *Augenblick*. And yet can we not hear an echo of one in the other? In the Aristotelian experience of pure apprehending, of, colloquially, “getting it,” there is a movement of the falling away, the dropping-off of imposed and artificial separation between phenomena, between me and it, that takes place. This falling away into pure perception has not been taken seriously often enough, the challenge has not been taken up in the West; the claim to our inability, via Kant, to experience the noumenal world has been taken ipso facto. According to Kant’s theory of transcendental idealism, we are permanently removed — estranged — from the world “as it is.” Our intuition is limited to perceiving mere representations of appearances, and never things as they are in themselves. Through reading with others, with Heidegger, with Dōgen, we can begin to understand this space between which Heidegger describes, the clearing between, the abyssal which opens constantly. And with Dōgen’s “total exertion” or *gujin* we see a reference to the undefiled freedom and liberation of the self (and thereby the world) that takes place in the noumenal apprehension of world. Can we not understand, more clearly, both the concept of *nikon*, that immediate here and now of pure perceiving which Dōgen describes, and *nous*, the un-rendered beyond of Aristotle, and thereby *Augenblick*, through reading them side by side by side?

Can we not indeed hear or see a trace, a Derridean specter or even stain of an idea, in the three? And if we can hear, should we not then listen?

A Blink of an Eye

The *Augenblick* at its most basic refers to a “blink” or a “glance of an eye.” As a metaphor, it refers to the sudden awareness, a total seeing or perception through which one transcends one’s own reality or world for a world unencumbered by subjectivities and prosaic, quotidian concerns; it allows one suddenly, temporally, to see the world “as it is,” bounded in a finite infinitude. Yet this transcension operates not by removing one to an other world; rather the *Augenblick* reveals the world as it, as an authentic coming to be. It describes a moment of fleeting suddenness, an awareness of what has already passed, and what is gone as it is coming to be. At the same time, a portal to an other experience of reality — the eventual experience of truth — is, in accordance with the very nature of the human being, caught as we are in the web of a finite, lived experience of world — gone in, quite literally, an “instant.” Though gone, the direct experience of the *Augenblick* results in an altered perception of one’s own time; the experience seems to make time *stand out of time*, to be bounded by an authentic experience of the limitless horizon of a state of possibility. The experience of the *Augenblick* serves to clear away the dross of the world, clearing the clearing for the eventual experience of truth.

The *Augenblick* can be compared (and indeed is not dissimilar) to the experience of *kaironic* time, that unique opening, or presenting of a “moment” in time in which the event of opening opens itself. As discussed in the previous chapter, this thinking of time is not unique to an understanding of the *Augenblick*, but it is, at least from the perspective of the West, an effective tool for gaining insight into how time manifests differently; the *Augenblick* presents itself to the present time as an encountering. This encountering is a waiting-towards similar to Boethius’s conception of *nunc stans*, of “standing now.” Heidegger writes

that nothing happens in the *Augenblick*, that what happens is an encountering, or “waiting-towards,” possibility. In *Being and Time*, Heidegger writes:

The presence [*Gegenwart*] which is held in temporality and which is thus authentic, we call the *Augenblick*. This term must be understood in the active sense as an ecstasis. It means the rapture of resolute openness in which Dasein is carried away towards whatever possibilities and circumstances are encountered in the situation, but a rapture that is held in this resolute openness. The *Augenblick* is a phenomenon that in principle can not be clarified in terms of the “now.” The “now” is a temporal phenomenon that belongs to time as within-time-ness: the “now” “within which” something arises, passes away, or is present-at-hand. Nothing can occur in the *Augenblick*; rather, as authentic presence or waiting-toward [*Gegen-wart*], the *Augenblick* lets us first encounter whatever can be “in a time” as ready-to-hand or present-to-hand.⁵

Whichever concept we choose to align ourselves with, what is clear is that the *Augenblick* is a radical departure — a new possible beginning — in how we conceive time, and thereby in how we ready ourselves to anticipate being. For most of our lives, time is a series of now-events; a rapidly dissolving line of present moments which dissipate into a miasma of memory (and in which, if I am to distinguish, or remember, a present moment, I am always bound from this moment to conceive of a moment in the past.) Time stretches distantly into both a futural not yet now and a past just gone. The *Augenblick*, as a single moment, as a singular glance of an eye, is used by Heidegger, and by Nietzsche before him, as a distinctly atemporal disruption in the unending linearity of prosaic time; the *Augenblick* is a sudden irruption which alters everything whilst everything, within its

5 Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), 338.

quodidian, prosaic reality, remains the same; present moments pass, the sun still sets, the shadows lengthen (for Dōgen, weeds grow and flowers fall), yet everything, via the *Augenblick*, becomes itself primordially, comes to itself in its originary form and without distortion. It is not time itself that is changed by the experience of the *Augenblick*, time remains as time is. Rather it is the experience of time as undergone by the perceiving agent that is changed. The *Augenblick* presents itself as a moment when the moment of this moment dissolves into all time, all possibility, becoming not time as we conceive it, but time without timepieces, without timekeeping. This encounter takes us from the homogenized satiety of prosaic time to a time which is originary, primordial, and ultimately transformative, sometimes violently so. As Heidegger describes it, this encountering is an encountering of “whatever can be.”

Heidegger’s Zarathustra

This transformation is described when Heidegger takes up Nietzsche’s treatment of the *Augenblick* in his lecture course on the thinker from the early 1940s. In Volume II of the collection, *The Eternal Recurrence of the Same*, Heidegger describes the third part of Nietzsche’s *Thus Spake Zarathustra* entitled “On the Vision and the Riddle.” Here Heidegger relates Zarathustra’s own tale to the sailors of his ascent of the mountain, struggling as he goes with the dwarf upon his back. Early on in the lecture, Heidegger takes up the question of the title — “why a ‘riddle?’” he asks. Drawing a distinction between an interpretation of the riddle as “calculation,” which can only “disclose step by step [...] something unknown from what is known,”⁶ or as “surmise,” which for Heidegger involves inevitably “a leap, without guidelines, without the rungs of any ladder which anyone can clamber up anytime,” Heidegger invites us, yet again, to “ven-

6 Martin Heidegger, *Nietzsche Volume II: The Eternal Recurrence of the Same*, trans. David Farrell Krell (New York: Harper & Row, 1984), 37.

ture [...] into that untraveled and uncharted region which is the unconcealment (*alētheia*) of what is most concealed.”⁷

The uncharted region here is Zarathustra’s and describes his struggle up a mountain all the while carrying — inexplicably — a dwarf upon his back, one who threatens to drag him back down. Heidegger describes the abyss from which Zarathustra climbs that is formed by his ascension, as the “depths [which] belong to the heights.”⁸ In a double articulation of the described space, Zarathustra is both climbing from the abyss as he creates it through his upward movement, as well as climbing towards a peak; the ascension — like any movement — is both a from and a towards.⁹ Through a withdrawal from the abyss, the valley below grows larger. “Inasmuch as Zarathustra thinks the abyss, the thought of thoughts, inasmuch as he takes the depths seriously, he rises to the heights and surpasses the dwarf.”¹⁰ As they climb, they come across a gateway, a gateway which divides two long paths (*Holzweg*). One leads forward and the other back, and both extend for “an eternity.” Nietzsche writes that “they contradict each other, these paths; they offend each other face to face; and it is here at this gateway that they come together.” The gateway is the “Moment” (*Augenblick*) and it is from the Moment that time runs away from us as “eternity.” But here Zarathustra queries the dwarf, asking if “these paths contradict each other eternally?” and the dwarf, responding contemptuously in Nietzsche’s telling, says, too easily, “Everything straight deceives [...] all truth is curved; time itself is a circle.” The riddle, it would seem, is solved, and, according to Heidegger, would appear to

7 Reading Heidegger on Nietzsche (who is writing about Zarathustra who is recounting a tale to the sailors) extends beyond the text this *mise-en-abyme* experience. To write further about Heidegger on this includes me suddenly in this event.

8 Heidegger, *Nietzsche II*, 40.

9 One can almost hear Pessoa here, when he, writing as Bernardo Soares, writes, in *The Book of Disquiet*, “We are two abysses — a well staring at the sky” (Fernando Pessoa, *The Book of Disquiet*, trans. Richard Zenith [New York: Penguin Classics, 2002], 20).

10 Heidegger, *Nietzsche II*, 40.

be one “scarcely [...] worth talking about.”¹¹ The concept is simple — too simple really — as what looks like two straight paths inevitably leading away from one another are in reality two segments of a vast circle, “which perpetually revolves back upon itself.”¹² Yet this simplicity is deceiving, both for Nietzsche via Zarathustra and certainly for Heidegger. Zarathustra, speaking “wrathfully” curses the dwarf, calling him “lamefoot,” for having simplified, too quickly, the question which is the thought of thoughts, for having reduced the question to a mere “ditty.” Zarathustra immediately questions the dwarf again, correcting him. “Behold, I continued, ‘this moment!’” From the gateway, a long path does indeed lead backwards, into an eternity. Zarathustra asks:

Must not whatever can walk have walked on this lane before?
Must not whatever can happen have happened, have been done, have passed by before? And if everything has been there before [...] must not this gateway have been there before? And are not all things knotted together so firmly that this moment draws after it all that is to come? therefore — itself too?¹³

While this thought of the eternal recurrence of the same has within it the potential for the familiar nihilistic disinterestedness of the dwarf’s response, it is, for Heidegger, specifically *that* command of Zarathustra’s — “Behold this Moment!” where the leap is made. The beholding of the Moment is a connection to authentic world, to a perduration of attention which leads one into the clearing. The boldness of that leap is precisely what differentiates Zarathustra from the dwarfish thoughts of others. If everything that must have happened has happened, then it is within the gateway of the Moment (*Augenblick*) that

¹¹ Ibid., 42.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, trans. R.J. Hollingsdale (London: Penguin Books, 1969), 179.

the “moment” of decision is made; all is not lost to disinterested nihilism—indeed the opposite occurs; within the event of the *Augenblick*, within what Heidegger will refer to elsewhere as the *Augenblickstätte*, the site of the *Augenblick*, authenticity as *alētheia* appears, is appropriated and is made its own. Truth events—*be*-comes—in the site of the moment, and the dwarf as the little man disappears, leaving one “suddenly alone, bleak, in the bleakest moonlight.”¹⁴

After Zarathustra has posed the second [command] there is no place left for the dwarf, who no longer belongs in the realm of this question because he cannot bear to hear it. Questioning, riddling and thinking, as they approach ever nearer the import of the riddle, themselves become more riddlesome, loom ever more gigantic, towering over the one who is doing the questioning. Not everyone has a right to every question. Rather than expect a response from the dwarf, and rather than reply a polished reply couched in propositions, Zarathustra continues the narrative: “Thus I spoke, and ever more softly: for I feared my own thoughts and hinterthoughts.” The thought that is hardest to bear grows terrifying. Behind what one may imagine as a turning in lazy circle, it decries something altogether different. It thinks the thought in a way dwarfs never think it.¹⁵

For Heidegger, that awareness of the *Augenblick*, that experiencing of the site of truth, is what differentiates our thought (*if we are to think*) from that of “the little man.” He writes that, “precisely, the knowledge that chokes us is what must be known if being as a whole is to be thought,”¹⁶ and that this thinking marks the “altogether unbridgeable difference between the usual kinds of spectation and cognition...and proper knowing.”¹⁷

14 Ibid.

15 Heidegger, *Nietzsche II*, 44.

16 Ibid., 55.

17 Ibid.

The problem that remains unacknowledged when we do not avail ourselves, or present ourselves to the eventual moment, the problem when we treat the riddle as contemptuous, when we remain, out of fear, out of derision, on the periphery, like the dwarf, is that we allow being to hide, occluded within the negative, and destroyed within nihilism. Heidegger writes that what allows the doctrine (or eternal recurrence) to be turned into a mere ditty is that

the latter concedes that things do depart, die, and disintegrate; it also accepts everything negative, adverse, and outrageous. Yet at the bottom these things are conceived of as eventually passing away in the world's circuitry, so that other things will come and everything shall take a turn for the better. Hence all is bound for perpetual compensation. Such compensation in fact makes everything indifferent: striving is flattened out into mere alternation. One now possesses a handy formula for the whole and abstains from all decision.¹⁸

This abstention denies us being, denies being the encounter with Being, for “to see the Moment means to stand in it. But the dwarf keeps to the outside, perches on the periphery”¹⁹ where it is safest, but where one is consequently condemned to the petty, to the small. It is by availing oneself to the darkest thoughts, the thoughts still to be thought, that being advances to Being. This is “what is hardest to bear.” Heidegger continues,

That which is to come is precisely a matter of decision, since the ring is not closed in some remote infinity but possesses its unbroken closure in the Moment, as the center of the striving: what recurs — if it is to recur — is decided by the Moment and by the force with which the Moment can cope with whatever in it is repelled by such striving.²⁰

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 56.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 57.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

The decision then of the Moment, of the *Augenblick*, is powerfully within the grasp of the one who is grasping, the one who is striving. It is for the being who has prepared for the encounter, who has trained and readied herself for the struggle, for she who has practiced most arduously.

That is what is peculiar to, and hardest to bear in, the doctrine of the eternal return — to wit, that eternity is the Moment, that the Moment is not the fleeting “now,” not an instant of time whizzing by the spectator, but the collision of future and past. Here the Moment comes to itself. It determines how everything recurs. Now the most difficult matter is the most tremendous matter to be grasped, and the tremendous remains a sealed door to little men.²¹

The *Augenblick* then becomes, rather than a mere waypoint through which pass the times of future and past, a gateway which is the site of the momentous event of being as Being and for truth, as unconcealment, to come forth, whereby the appropriating event takes place. It is not a clash, nor even a gateway as such; to experience the *Augenblick* is to be the *Augenblick*. It is not to be remaindered as a peripheral force but to be the force itself, to be energy manifesting itself as such; not to be the bystander sitting upon a stump looking on, but rather to be looking from within. This is what, for Nietzsche, as for Heidegger is meant by the thinking of the most abyssal thought. The person who can think this way can

also overcome his outrage and repugnance by learning that the abyss belongs to the heights. To overcome outrage is not to put it out of action but to acknowledge its necessity. As long as outrage is merely repudiated by disgust, as long as our contempt is determined by Nausea, that contempt remains dependent upon the contemptible. Only when contempt springs from love of the task, being transformed in

21 Ibid.

such a way that, undergirded by an affirmation of the necessity of outrage, suffering, and destruction, it can pass by in silence; only when the silence of such loving passing-by prevails; only then does the vast stillness extend and the sphere expand about the one who in this way has become himself. Only now that the vast stillness pervades Zarathustra's spirit has he found his loneliest loneliness, a solitude that has nothing to do with a merely peripheral existence.²²

It is through this movement which occurs within the moment of the *Augenblick*, which Heidegger will eventually call the event, as it occurs within the *Augenblickstätte*.

I admit to struggling with the story of the eternal recurrence of the same; it is too fanciful, too incredible—I am the “dwarf” as much as I deny it, understanding it too, too simply. And yet, and yet? Whether I understand it or not is precisely not the point—the point is the leap, the falling into the abyss, the willingness to leap, the willingness to think within the abyssal ground of the event. There is in the story, in the parable, if we allow it to be, if we open ourselves to it, a remarkable sudden pause, a falling away. What if it is true? What if we consider it not as poetry and metaphor but as possibility, seriously? What if “this slow spider, which crawls in the moonlight, and this moonlight itself, and I and you in the gateway, whispering together, whispering of eternal things—must not all have been here before?”²³ Germinating in that frightening concept lies the reason Zarathustra speaks now more and more softly and becomes afraid of his thoughts, “and the thoughts behind [my] thoughts”; the *Augenblick* here acts as a sudden portal, an opening into timeless time, into primordial time, into a new beginning. It is the falling away of body and mind, a powerful, transformative, horrifying force which takes us away, suddenly, as in a leap, from all that is known and leads us towards that new beginning.

²² *Ibid.*, 60.

²³ Nietzsche, *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, 180.

Dōgen's Buddha-Nature and Nikon

This portal through which Heidegger, via Zarathustra, would have us fall, or descend, or ascend, leap or be pushed, is, as just mentioned, a falling away of body and mind, a dissolution of the false duality of perceiver and receiver. It is a transition away from dialectics, a traversal *towards* another beginning. Dōgen, as quoted above, refers to a similar falling away in the “Genjōkōan” fascicle when he writes “to be confirmed by all dharmas is to cast off one’s body and mind and the bodies and minds of other as well.”²⁴ For Heidegger, it is a “venture” which “jettisons and leaves behind everything conventional”²⁵ and this feeling of vertigo which is elicited when the concept — if truly thought (*when we have begun to think*) — is echoed in, or echoes, at least in part, again, Dōgen’s remarkable “Busshō” (Buddha-nature) fascicle, a radical, non-dualistic description of the inherent Buddha-nature which resides in all sentient beings. Like Heidegger, Dōgen (to the frustration of many a translator) rediscovered in language hidden meanings — this time in classical Chinese as opposed to the Greek — bending, and at times even torturing meaning, to fit his understanding of a concept. Like Heidegger, he does this to direct attention away from a common, prosaic reading, a reading received and accepted by *das Man* and to accent the unique, particular form of interpretation his thinking demands. In doing so, again like Heidegger, Dōgen “allows” for a clearing to take place in which understanding, as *kensho*, or pure perceiving, takes place.

Dōgen begins the “Busshō” fascicle with a quotation from the *Nirvana Sutra*, which, when translated, according to Waddell and Abe, “normally,” reads “All sentient beings have the Buddha-nature.” Dōgen, however, chooses to interpret the phrase to mean “All beings/entire being *is* the Buddha-nature,” by, again according to Waddell and Abe, “arbitrarily reading the

24 Eihei Dōgen, *The Heart of Dōgen's Shōbōgenzō*, trans. Norman Waddell and Masao Abe (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002), 41.

25 Heidegger, *Contributions to Philosophy (Of the Event)*, 179.

characters *shitsu* [...] as ‘entire being.’”²⁶ This interpretation has the effect of changing the meaning, and thereby the direction of our common understanding that sentient beings have an awakened awareness (of Buddha-nature) in which they have the potential to reach in some undetermined future to the more radical conception of being, as the totality of all being which is always already Buddha-nature, in the immediate now. This shift is as radical a move as Heidegger’s description of the event as a clearing, or a lightening; what already is, is already there — our task is to perceive the event purely, without the mediation of an inauthentic world. We are to perceive the clearing, to allow it to unfold as it is, and not to await it in some distant yet too manifest future, not to attend it.

To Waddell and Abe, this obviates the false dichotomy of “a duality of subject (sentient beings) and object (Buddha-nature)” as they explain in a footnote to their translation of “Busshō.” It serves to sever the uncomfortable idea that enlightenment (for us, awareness of world worlding) is something that comes in the future, that remains a possibility, however vague, to be replaced with a clear conception that entire being is already enlightened awareness, that the distant possibility of a futural event is already, indeed is, now in the immediate moment (as it is for all future nows). World worlding is no longer a distant concept not yet arrived; rather, being as being is now, in the particular momentless moment. Dōgen writes:

You must understand that the “being” that the Buddha-nature makes *entire being* is not the being of being and nonbeing. *Entire being* is a Buddha’s words, a Buddha’s tongue, the pupils of a Buddha-patriarch’s eyes, the noseholes of a Zen monk. Nor does the term *entire being* mean emergent being, or original being, or mysterious being, or anything of the like, much less conditioned being or illusory being. It has

26 Dōgen, *The Heart of Dōgen’s Shōbōgenzō*, 60n.

nothing to do with such things as mind and object, substance and form.²⁷

The being that Dōgen is describing here is simply being — not original nor primordial — it simply is being *qua* being which resides as itself, as everything that there is. Thus, for Dōgen, the mountains which are quietly walking towards the sea, indeed, are the sea by ontological necessity, as the mountains are, already, the noseholes of a Zen monk. This is not to say that everything just is everything else; that view would leave us in an amorphous bog of being and becoming. Rather, everything has, immanently, everything else, and therefor is, in some reading of it, everything else. There is no futural being to which some one or any thing aspires, and the teleological arc of temporal domains is done away with. Entire being is not an imagined future, a something to become, but an ontological fact in itself, in this present time, in all present times.

No thing, however, and this is critical, is not a negation of thingness. In traditional Western metaphysics, the concept of nothing, or no thing, is nihilistic and destructive; that there is something is of importance, and no thing is a rational impossibility. But we are not discussing traditions here, and the question of whether there is something or nothing is meaningless when we attune ourselves to the possibility of a new beginning in which the dichotomy of the excluded middle is set to the side as a flawed, unhelpful, and even erroneous concept. For a thinker who is willing to think differently, who is willing, with Heidegger, to think a new beginning (who is willing to begin to think), no thing becomes, in its no-thingness, the very possibility not only of some thing but of every thing. Everything hinges on the possibility of nothingness, and of the inherent emptiness of that everything. *Nirvāṇa* in the original Sanskrit means “no wind,” or “no breath,” and is occasionally read as “blown out.” As a concept not unlike a *via negativa* (that is, *that what is, is not that*), this negation of something refers to the perfect stillness of

²⁷ Ibid., 62.

not grasping, not insisting. Instead, *nirvāṇa* points us towards an absolute emptiness as an attunement towards a reality empty of essential essence.

That everything already is, and yet is not, radically denies personal possession. No thing can be held as individual, as absolute in a world in which time, as a future predictor of emergence, is not anymore a characteristic of time as such; time is seen instead as the momentary absolute. Instead of beings in the future emerging, time is emerging for them, at this very instant. Dōgen writes that to view “the entire world and everything in it” as my personal possessions is a “false, non-Buddhist teaching.” For Dōgen, entire being

is not original (timeless) being, because it fills the past right on up through the present. It is not separate, individual beings, because it is an all-inclusive whole. It is not beginning-less being, because, “What is this that thus comes.” It is not being that appears at a certain time, because “my everyday mind is in the Way.” You must know with certainty that with *entire being* it is impossible, even with the greatest swiftness, to encounter sentient beings. Understood in this way, *entire being* is in itself completely and totally emancipated suchness.²⁸

It is important that we pause here to try and unpack this enigmatic passage. The move Dōgen is making in effect decimates our prosaic understanding of subject and object, of perceiver and perceived, of being in the world. Entire being fills time, overflows time; there is no separation between past and future, not even in the form of the present. Entire being does not begin, nor does it end in any understandable sense; it simply is, and it perdures, but not merely as a moment which passes from the future to the past in a form of exchange, but as absolute time, as, for Dōgen, “totally emancipated suchness.” There is no form as time for entire being to “be”; rather entire being is, and is

28 Ibid., 63.

time as well. An everyday understanding of sentient beings is that they are rooted in an everyday time — things die and are born (and if we follow a Buddhist ontology, die and are born endlessly) — but entire being cannot “encounter” them, as it is wholly “suchness” and nothing else.

As a result of entire being encompassing everything, there is no thing that is not Buddha-nature, that is not already suchness as such and which has not already “filled in” everything, though even here, to use a word such as “already” denotes that there might have been a time, now past, when “already” had not yet happened. That is incorrect. We must be careful to delineate between what, for us in the West we would see as a negation, and what Dōgen views as the “no” (*mu*) in no-Buddha-nature. For Dōgen, “emptiness is not ‘no’”; instead, emptiness resists the negative, and further it is emptiness precisely which allows for it, not only the possibility to be everything but also that in everything, it remains a possibility. Dōgen views *mu* as the not-that which always resists the *that*.

Hence every piece of *mu* is a touchstone to articulate emptiness; emptiness is the capacity to articulate *mu*. This is not the emptiness of “form is emptiness.” “Form is emptiness” does not mean form is forced into emptiness, nor is it making form out of emptiness. It has to be the emptiness of “emptiness is emptiness.” The emptiness of “emptiness is emptiness” is a piece of rock in emptiness.²⁹

As *mu* resists the designation of the *that*, it always already exceeds any definition of no-thingness. Nothing, then, is not the replacement of something; nothingness as emptiness remains everything while being no particular, unique thing. Emptiness allows *mu* to become no, it is the action of no, and as no, *mu* stubbornly remains a touchstone through which we interrogate and experience emptiness. To say something is merely empty is to reveal a nihilistic claim; to describe the emptiness of empti-

29 Ibid., 72.

ness is emptiness is to travel a far deeper route into the heart of everything's essential, inherent emptiness. This is not a forced march into nihilism, as the critics of Buddhism often claim; rather, there is at work a surrender (of one's self, one's claim to the world, one's personal and unique access the world) born out of practice, or out of attunement. Dōgen, in the "Uji" fascicle on time, advises that "You must not by your own maneuvering make it into nothingness; you must not force it into being."³⁰ Instead of pushing into a proof as a scientific, rational mind might insist, there is a stepping away, a stepping back to allow emptiness itself to come forward.

It is important to remember that Dōgen is not describing anything like a surrender in the "stepping away" described earlier. He uses, repeatedly through the *Shōbōgenzō*, two words which mean similar, though separate things; *gūjin* refers to "total exertion" and *gyōji* to "continuous practice." One cannot exist without the other, but when they are practiced, sustained, and, importantly, lived, they become powerful tools for inhabiting one's world (or via Dōgen, allowing world to inhabit one's self). Indeed, through exertion and practice, Dōgen calls on one to place oneself in the world, "to set the self out in array and make that the whole world." By setting the self out, through "total exertion," we presence ourselves in the world, and world presences through us; we become world. But this is not the ego that I put forward, the ego which insists on world. Rather, through active surrender, (and in this we can anticipate Heidegger's concept of *Gelassenheit*) we come to world in an authentic and unstained way. Dōgen writes, in the "Genjōkōan" fascicle:

Life is, for example, like a man sailing in a boat. Although he sets sail, steers his course, and poles his boat along, the boat carries him and he does not exist apart from the boat. By sailing in the boat, he makes it what the boat is. Study assiduously this very time.³¹

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

The boat and the man are one, and though the man makes choices, decides when to leave and where to go to, and remains nominally in charge, the man does not exist as separate from the boat.³² The man makes the boat (without him there would be no boat, or at least no ‘boat function’), but the man cannot exist (in this “very time”) without the boat. The man and the boat are one, and thus the dichotomies of subject and object fall away. Dōgen continues:

At such a time, there is nothing but the world of the boat. The heavens, the water, and the shore — all become the boat’s time, and they are not the same as the time that is not the boat. Hence, I make life what it is; life makes me what I am.³³

I am not separate from what life is, though by living, I make life what life is. The heavens and the water and the boat are not separate; each thing, as am I, are exactly balanced in this very time, in this very moment. Every thing is where it should be because it can’t be somewhere else.

In sailing the boat, one’s body and mind, the self and the world, are together the dynamic function of the boat. The entire earth and the whole empty sky are in company with the boat’s vigorous exertion. Such is the I that is life, the life that is I.³⁴

Total exertion is the absolute presencing of one’s self in one’s activity. This could best be described as a musician performing; the total dedication that it takes for Pablo Casals or Mitsuko Uchida to present themselves to the music, and to present the music through their “total exertion” is clear to us. For Heidegger, a similar concept is called for in relation to the cabinet maker in “What Calls for Thinking.” The cabinet maker requires “relatedness” to avoid reducing his craft down to mere “busywork.” The

32 I follow here, very roughly, Heidegger translator Joan Stambaugh’s own argument on the same passage that she writes about in *Impermanence Is Buddha-Nature: Dōgen’s Understanding of Temporality* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1990), 31.

33 Dōgen, *The Heart of Dōgen’s Shōbōgenzō*, 42.

34 *Ibid.*, 42.

cabinet maker must “answer and respond above all” to the calling of the wood, “to the shapes slumbering within wood—to wood as it enters into man’s dwelling with all the hidden riches of its essence.”³⁵ In a similar fashion, the shoes in Van Gogh’s painting, which are not beings as such, exert themselves according to Heidegger. In “The Origin of the Work of Art,” Heidegger writes that “the more simply and essentially the shoes are engrossed in their essence, the more directly and engagingly do all beings attain a greater degree of being along with them.” The more a something engages in its ownmost exertion of being, the more deeply does it make its presence known, even to itself. For Dōgen however, it goes much farther than a “mere” master performing a masterful work. At the risk of giving a vitalist reading to the text, Dōgen argues for every thing in the world exerting itself in its own time. The boat and the empty sky are exerting themselves as is the sailor. A flower is exerting its presence in a meadow, as is the meadow, as is the mountain towering above, as am I making my way across a valley (on which the meadow and the flower and the mountain are already also exerting). I remain, like the sailor in a boat, entities inseparable from each other, from the sky above, from the sea, both a single entity walking across a meadow and yet also utterly interconnected, even interpenetrated, by the myriad things of the world. I exert myself and sustain and perdure as something which I could not produce by myself alone, which is world. Through my exertion, I bring forth an equally exerting world.

This is admittedly hard to see, and for Dōgen, it is only through the second term mentioned above, *gyōji*, or continuous practice that we can come to experience the total exertion of world(s). Even though exertions happen constantly and we are unaware of them (the world is exerting itself now, and now, and now...) it is only through our attunement to the “myriad dharmas” that we come to be aware of it. This is different from Aristotle’s sense of *potenza* which occurs in each thing; rather, in *gūjin*, or total exertion, the world is presenting itself at every

35 Heidegger, *Basic Writings*, 379.

moment, in this very moment. The table makes itself manifest in a very direct way, through strenuous exertion, as a table before me. The rock on the hillside behind me is manifesting itself through its own exertions, as is the ice that is breaking up in the bay, as is the bird over head, as is my coffee in front of me, or my mobile beside me. This attunement to the presence of each thing, unique and interconnected, but vital and necessary, even to those of us who cannot see the connection, is essential to understanding the version of Buddhism that Dōgen puts forward. Continuous practice, as unremitting attunement, to a world exerting, is necessary to enter into this world which is always already present, only withdrawn, separate.

While we may talk of self as the closest thing we know, for Dōgen, the self is only that; the nearest manifestation of the myriad dharmas *be*-coming. Indeed, there are many selves, infinite selves, constantly exerting, constantly presencing. Of all the enigmas presented in the “Genjōkōan,” perhaps none is as elusive as the paragraph that begins “To learn the Buddha Way is to learn one’s self.” Dōgen writes:

To learn the Buddha Way is to learn one’s self. To learn one’s self is to forget one’s self. To forget oneself is to be confirmed by all dharmas. To be confirmed by all dharmas is to cast off one’s body and mind and the bodies and minds of others as well. All trace of enlightenment disappears, and this traceless enlightenment continues without end.³⁶

Within traditional Western metaphysics, this self might mean the one that’s found through a deep, authentic search, one that we can find, deeply within, and which remains constant. For Dōgen, it is not so easy. The self is only all selves, and it is only by practicing continuously that we come to understand this. Without continuous practice, we remain locked in the prosaic world of individual essences competing and clashing. “To forget oneself is to be confirmed by all dharmas.” Only by actively leav-

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 41.

ing the self behind, the ego self that I so strenuously prioritize on a quotidian, minute-by-minute basis, can I free myself from the dichotomies of everyday existence. Only by doing this, by “allowing”³⁷ myself to be confirmed, am I able to “cast off [my] body and mind and the bodies and minds of others as well.” This is what it means — to Dōgen — to be authentic; it means to not be the self, and to not be the self of others. The dharma is not found externally, nor is it found internally; one is inseparable from the dharma, and the dharma inseparable from one. It is only by pushing aside false views, by “allowing” (see footnote above) one’s self to awaken to what is already there does one come to one’s true self (which is not a self at all). Dōgen describes this process elsewhere as “the right transmission from oneself to oneself” and calls this becoming a becoming aware, or awakened to “the Person of your original part.”

Joan Stambaugh, mentioned above, attempts to explain *gyūjin* through Leibniz’s monads in her *Impermanence Is Buddha-Nature*. Describing a colleague who, when he could not remember the precise term Leibniz had written, used instead the word “worldlets.” In Leibniz’s theory, each being exists as a finite monad, a little worldlet. Each worldlet contains within itself the entire world which it mirrors, but only ever in an imprecise and partial way. For Leibniz, only God can reflect an entire world as something complete. Because of our own limitations, and the limitations of individual beings, we cannot know a monad completely; if we could, we could know the entire universe because “each monad would be a deity.”³⁸ But, according to Leibniz, while monads are limited, they are also reaching out “in a confused way [...] to infinity or to the whole.”³⁹ As unique, individual worldlets — worlds to themselves — monads are also

37 Language again begins to fail us because by “allowing” something I already admit, indeed insist, to some control over the world, when in fact I am powerless. Remember that the first paragraph of the “Genjōkōan” ends with the phrase: “Yet for all that, flowers fall amidst our regret and yearning, and hated weeds grow apace” (Dōgen, *The Heart of Dōgen’s Shōbōgenzō*, 40).

38 Stambaugh, *Impermanence Is Buddha-Nature*, 33.

39 Ibid.

interconnected; each reflects the other. Each monad fills and extends itself into the world. Leibniz explains that

composites are like simple substances, for all space is filled up; therefore, all matter is connected. And in a plenum or a filled space, every movement has an effect upon bodies in proportion to this distance, so that not only is every body affected by those which are in contact with it and responds in some way to whatever happens to them, but also by means of them the body responds to those bodies adjoining them, and their intercommunication reaches to any distance. Consequently every body responds to all that happens in the universe. Consequently every body responds to all that happens in the universe, so he who saw all could read in each one what is happening everywhere, and even what has happened and what will happen. He can discover in the present what is distant both as regards space and as regards time.⁴⁰

While Stambaugh uses the above passage to unfold the fascicle “Uji,” we can also find in it a better understanding of what Dōgen means in his description of being in Buddha-nature; as a monad, or as one of the myriad *dharma*s, I am both complete in myself, but also interconnected to everything else around me, in ways that I cannot fathom, nor barely imagine. My self (such as it is), is always already responding “to all that happens in the universe.” Within each occurring phenomenon, this is repeated; as something comes to be, it has, immanently, everything else as a possibility. A possibility is always an opening. Something that *may* come to be as a possibility opens me to a different decision in the world. If everything is planned out, if there is no possibility of something different occurring, then nothing can come forward; everything that is must already be. Leibniz, via Stambaugh, allows for worlds to open outwards into other worlds; despite the finitude of this worldlet, I remain infinite in

⁴⁰ Ibid.

the possibilities — as interpenetrations, reflections, and refractions — available through infinite worlds.

Heidegger perhaps echoes the sentiment or understanding of *mu* more clearly than any other modern philosopher when he describes this “open” in *Contributions*; he describes the open “as the unprotectedness of the carrying out of thrownness; both belonging together as the clearing of self-concealing. The ‘there’ as ap-propriated in the event.” The clearing of self-clearing repeats and opens up the possibility of *mu* as a touchstone. The task of understanding the emptiness of emptiness is emptiness requires unprotectedness as practice. Unprotectedness becomes an opportunity to the possibility of the open.